

Mowat Joins Laurier.

Ontario's Premier Writes to the Liberal Leader Stating That Intention and Giving His Reasons.

The following letter has been addressed by Sir Oliver Mowat to Hon. Wilfrid Laurier :

TORONTO, 2nd May, 1896.

MY DEAR MR. LAURIER,—

When first the application was made to me some weeks ago to give up my position as Premier of Ontario and become a candidate for a seat in the House of Commons, with a view to accepting a position in the Dominion Reform Government, which is confidently expected to follow the general elections, the proposal seemed to me to be out of the question, there being in Parliament, under your leadership, many able men, and the general elections being likely to add to their number. I disliked what was proposed, because, first of all, it involved severing my connection with North Oxford, which has stood by me at so many elections, and where I have so many esteemed personal friends. Then, again, no position which practically could be assigned to me in the Dominion Government would be equal in popular estimation, or in my own, to that of Premier of Canada's greatest province; and there were other reasons important to myself and my family which appeared to forbid my making the change suggested. One of these was that the assumption of new duties in a new field would involve an increase of work and worry, while a public man, nearly 76 years of age, however full of health and strength he may be, might reasonably be looking for less work and less worry rather than voluntarily taking upon himself more. While I am now abundantly equal to my present duties, and my medical adviser tells me that if I do not take too much upon myself I may look forward to years yet of active life, it seemed to me that I could not count as nothing the addition of a contested election in a new constituency, and afterwards annual sessions of Parliament twice as long as in Ontario, and with much later hours. To remove to some extent this objection it has been suggested that I might take a seat in the Senate instead of the House of Commons. I perceive the advantages of this, both as regards myself personally and as regards the consideration of future constitutional changes which would add to the usefulness of that body, assuming that a Second Chamber for the Dominion is to be retained. How a Second Chamber consisting so largely of the nominees of one party as the Senate now does can be just to a new Government of another party remains to be seen; and the necessity of early constitutional changes may depend on this.

Besides my correspondence with yourself and my personal interview with you, I have during the last few weeks had many communications from and conversations with other representative Liberals; and it has been made plain to me that it is the general opinion of the party to whose favor and confidence are owing my 23 years of the Premiership of Ontario, that the crisis is so grave that every personal sacrifice has to be made, and every incidental risk run, if the country is to be rescued from the misgovernment which the Dominion has so long been suffering from. From the reasons laid before me I perceive that my long experience, and my success in official life in this province, are thought to be a guarantee that I could render useful service in the new Government and Parliament of the Dominion. I feel that I have to consider the matter in the light of these opinions.

I am happy to know that you and I are, and I believe have always been,

I am happy to know that you and I are, and I believe have always been, in substantial accord as regards Dominion questions. Our national origin is not the same; our religious creeds are different; but we are both of Canadian birth; we both love Canada and the Empire, and we both rejoice in our British connection. We both desire the prosperity of Canada and the well-being of all classes, conditions and creeds in its population; and I believe that we agree as to the best means of securing these objects.

We are, I believe, at one with respect to the tariff. I think with you that the introduction of the protective system was a mistake on the part of our people. So you, like myself, are a Reformer and not a revolutionist, and you recognize the necessity of legislation on the tariff being gradual and cautious. Adopting that policy, I am glad that you see your way meantime to changes which will be a relief to our farmers, and at the same time will not injuriously affect but rather benefit manufacturers and their workmen. A Government owes a duty to all classes of the people.

I quite see that one difficulty in legislation on the subject is the fact that considerable capital has been invested in manufactories on the faith that a system which our people, unfortunately, have sanctioned for 18 years would not be abrogated hastily or without due regard to the interests which have arisen under that system. I quite see also that the difficulty of legislation is greatly enhanced by the enormous debt which the present Government has created during the last 18 years and the large revenue which is needed for the payment of the annual charges incidental to the debt. Almost every year millions have been added to our liabilities, while hundreds of thousands of dollars of the people's money have been going into the election funds of the party, and still more been wasted by extras, and by indifference, incompetency or worse.

The Manitoba school question will occupy a good deal of attention during the elections. In the light of past events, I should not despair of the question being settled in a manner acceptable to the reasonable people of Manitoba, and the reasonable Roman Catholics of the Dominion. My opinion in regard to it, and that of the Liberals of the Ontario Legislature, was expressed in the resolution passed on the subject during our last session. We have had in Ontario questions of various kinds which seemed as difficult of solution as this question is, and they have been dealt with by the Ontario Legislature satisfactorily.

On these questions, and on most others, intelligent Conservatives now agree with Reformers, whether they will vote for Reform candidates or not. If the Reform platform were less acceptable than it is to intelligent and independent minded non-Reformers the scandals which have come to light afford more than sufficient ground for all men to condemn, and to join in displacing all men who were parties to the scandals, whatever they arose from. In view of all such facts, it is plain to many Conservatives that the usefulness of a Conservative Government under its present leaders is gone, and that a few years of opposition would do the party and the country much good. I venture to concur in that opinion.

For myself, in the interest of Canada, I desire greatly to see a Government in power under your leadership, being confident that it would be a good Government, honest and economical, thoughtful with respect to every province and to all classes of the people, giving to all their just rights, and promoting harmony and goodwill everywhere. It would be an honor to assist you in this patriotic work; and, therefore, in deference to your opinion and that of so many other representative Liberals, I have made up my mind to forego all considerations of a personal kind to the contrary, and join you in what will be the second Reform Government since Confederation, if such should continue to be your wish. Everyone recognizes the merits of the first Reform Government, of which the pure-minded Alexander Mackenzie was leader, and which unfortunately for the country the hard times overthrew in 1878. Permit me to say that, in common with my fellow Liberals throughout Canada, and in common also with many candid Conservatives, I have the same confidence in you as we all had in Mr. Mackenzie; and in the interest of the country I trust that you will have a much longer term of political power, for the good of the people of Canada, than fell to the lot of our lamented friend.

Very faithfully yours,

O. MOWAT.

The Honorable Wilfrid Laurier, M.P., Etc., Etc.